

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"



M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES

The Official Union Newsletter – "The Word to the Wise"

Number 15 – April 9, 2020



In this issue//Bipartisan Support for Jones Act, No Waiver Requested//COMFORT Takes on COVID-19 Patients//Appreciation for Staten Island Ferry Workers as Challenges Remain//Transit Worker Unions Demand Protection for Frontline Workers//Global COVID-19 Port Map for Seafarers//Coast Guard Supporting Cruise Ship Passenger Disembarkation//Philly Shipyard to Build Academy Multi-Mission Ships//CMES Updates Class Cancellations//NOAA Partners with Undersea Explorer//Halls Closed for Good Friday//

BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR JONES ACT; WAIVER PUSH DOESN'T EMERGE

Bipartisan support for the Jones Act has helped stare down the latest challenge to the all-American statute that supports U.S.-flag shipping and jobs. Oil and gas interests met with President Trump last Friday and had been expected to use the coronavirus crisis as a pretext to requesting a Jones Act waiver. Sources at the meeting say the waiver request did not materialize. Pro-U.S.-flag shipping voices were present in the meeting to argue against such a waiver had it been requested.

Last week, U.S.-flag shipping interests, represented by almost 200 signatories, including the M.E.B.A., sent a letter to President Trump asking him to keep the Jones Act strong. That letter can be found on the M.E.B.A. website located at www.mebaunion.org. A bipartisan group of House leaders also issued a statement opposing any effort to waive the Jones Act. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Chair Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Ranking Member Sam Graves (R-MO) along with the Coast Guard & Maritime Transportation Subcommittee Chair Sean Maloney (D-NY), and Ranking Member Bob Gibbs (R-OH) said, "The Jones Act has been and remains critical to supporting U.S. mariners' jobs and our maritime industry. Waiving the law, even temporarily, would be a mistake and weaken our domestic maritime supply chain just when we need it the most. We should not risk the jobs of those U.S. workers who move 99 percent of U.S. overseas trade and 100% of our coastwise trade. As the bipartisan Committee leaders, we oppose any effort to waive the Jones Act."

Separately, Congressman Steven Palazzo (R-Miss.) also dispatched a letter to President Trump asking him to maintain the integrity of this important statute. "Waiving the Jones Act would help foreign entities, harm our American maritime base, and risk our military readiness...A waiver at this time is unnecessary and in direct conflict with existing law but I fully expect that long-time opponents of the Jones act will seek to capitalize on this national crisis as they have attempted many times before."

COMFORT TAKING ON COVID-19 PATIENTS

The mission of the Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS COMFORT has evolved after authorities determined that the vessel could better assist the current crisis by treating COVID-19 patients. The vessel was originally slated to treat non-COVID-19 patients, but it became apparent that the ship could better relieve shoreside hospitals by assisting those stricken with the virus. The vessel was putting systems in place to better meet the challenges presented by onloading infectious patients. Before the first COVID-19 patient had been admitted, the Navy announced that an unidentified

member of the ship's sailing crew had tested positive for COVID-19 and was quarantined. The Navy said other crewmembers tested negative and those who came in contact with the infected shipmate were isolated as a precaution.

On the West Coast, the USNS MERCY continues to treat only non-COVID-19 patients at this juncture. A member of the medical crew tested positive for COVID-19 this week and was isolated then transferred off the ship.

APPRECIATION FOR S.I. FERRY WORKERS AS SYSTEM CONTINUES TO FACE CHALLENGES

Mariners, including M.E.B.A. deck and engineering officers, are keeping the Staten Island Ferry system operating while they continue to navigate challenges during this pandemic. New York City is now the world's epicenter of the COVID-19 virus and the Staten Island Ferry service, like others, has been adapting to the crisis with new protocols and procedures implemented in the name of health and safety. The service is operating on a reduced schedule as ridership has fallen off by 86% over last year's levels. Passengers are being asked to spread out, maintain their distance and remain seated until the ferry is docked. The City just announced budget cuts for the upcoming Fiscal Year that could further reduce overnight ferry service.

New York Transportation Department Commissioner Polly Trottenberg lauded Staten Island Ferry vessel crews and those responsible for maintaining operations during these tough times. "I want to thank you for your hard work and public service during the COVID-19 crisis," she wrote in a letter sent to employees. "Keeping the ferries running, especially so that health care professionals and other essential workers can continue to commute, is an important lifeline right now. In ways we know you may have never expected, you are on the front lines, and I know that you are proud to be serving your City, alongside many of your City and MTA [*Metropolitan Transportation Authority*] colleagues. We are grateful to you all."

"And we are working hard," she continued, "along with your union leadership, to address your concerns and make the ferry operation safe and sustainable for you and the traveling public. DOT and Ferries leadership have been working closely with the leadership at MM&P — Don Marcus, Richard Russo, Stephen Doherty, Don Josberger and at M.E.B.A. — Marshall Ainley, Jason Callahan, and three of your colleagues at Ferries, Frank Lamiquiz, Roland Rexha, and Chris Ferraro. We are continuing to strengthen our coordination and are appreciative of their partnership. I can assure you all that they have been strong and effective advocates for you."

TRANSIT WORKER UNIONS DEMAND PROTECTION OF FRONTLINE WORKERS

Two unions representing the overwhelming majority of U.S. transit workers who operate bus, subway, and streetcar systems are jointly vowing to take "aggressive action" if system operators don't better protect their workers from COVID-19. The Transport Workers Union of America (TWU) and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) are demanding that transit agencies take immediate steps to protect workers. Together the two unions represent more than 330,000 U.S. workers including bus and train operators, conductors, trackworkers, car cleaners, mechanics, and other frontline transit workers in nearly every transit system in America. The unions say their members are reporting overcrowded buses and work locations, and thousands of transit workers have contracted the virus with dozens of fatalities.

“If transit agencies don’t take immediate and dramatic steps to protect our members, there will be serious consequences,” TWU International President John Samuelsen said. “We will not sit back and let transit workers be treated like cannon fodder in this war against the coronavirus. We can—and will—take aggressive action.”

“We are working in, and they’re being brought to work in, 40-foot petri dishes with absolutely no protective equipment,” ATU President John Costa said. “Too many transit agencies are not providing personal protective equipment for their employees, endangering the lives of our members and the families they go home to. It is beyond shameful that those tasked with overseeing these agencies during this crisis have allowed us to arrive at this juncture! We are prepared to take whatever aggressive action is necessary in order to protect our members and their families. Nothing is off the table. Dying is no way to make a living.”

The unions called for a series of measures including the issuance of protective equipment to transit workers, better disinfection of work spaces, new protocols to more safely accommodate passengers, and many other common sense measures to protect workers as well as those using mass transit.

GLOBAL COVID-19 PORT MAP FOR SEAFARERS

The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) has launched a map showing the effect of COVID-19 restrictions on countries and ports around the globe. Based on data from the ITF’s network of around 140 inspectors and contact networks, the map is a vital resource for the thousands of seafarers hit hard by the crisis. Governments are imposing various restrictions on vessels and crew, and the map allows users to find the latest information. It can be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/yx7whh4g>

The ITF inspectorate coordinator Steve Trowsdale said: “The world’s seafarers have been left in a uniquely vulnerable position by this crisis. They are miles from home with little access to useful or helpful information. This map is just another way the ITF is using everything at its disposal to be there for every seafarer caught up in this situation. Any seafarer with serious problems should use the map to contact the nearest inspector or network coordinator, or our dedicated seafarers support team.”

COAST GUARD ASSISTS CRUISE SHIP PASSENGER DISEMBARKATION

The Coast Guard announced they have helped process and disembark more than 120 vessels in the last month in efforts to remove 250,000 passengers from cruise ships due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the cruise line industry announced a voluntarily suspension of ship operations from U.S. ports of call on March 13th, and the CDC issued a “No Sail” Order on March 14th to all cruise ships that had not voluntarily suspended operations. The Coast Guard, working with Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), (along with port jurisdictional entities), have helped facilitate the safe landing, screening, quarantine and repatriation of these passengers in a manner that has prevented further spread of the COVID-19 virus.

PHILLY SHIPYARD WILL BUILD ACADEMY MULTI-MISSION SHIPS

Philly Shipyard will construct up to five maritime academy vessels following a recent award. This is much-needed news for the yard that had begun to lay off workers after the completion of the newbuild Matson ships last year. The National Security Multi-Mission Vessels (NSMV) will replace the aging training vessels at the maritime academies and each ship will be capable of supporting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in times of need.

“Investing in maritime education creates more American jobs,” said Maritime Administrator Mark Buzby. “By the selection of Philly Shipyard, Inc., as the construction shipyard for the NSMV, this effort is not only bolstering the U.S. Merchant Marine, but the U.S. economy and vital transportation infrastructure as well.”

CMES UPDATES CLASS CANCELLATIONS

The Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School will cancel classes through May 3, 2020 in conjunction with Trustee-level guidance and state and local directives tied into the national emergency.

The additional class cancellations include BST Refresher (May 4-8), BST Revalidation (May 11-15), MEP & HVS (May 11-22), BST Revalidation (May 18-22), and Leadership & Management (May 18-22).

This is a constantly evolving situation. Additional cancellations and changes may need to be made. As this happens, notifications will be sent out as quickly as possible.

NOAA PARTNERS WITH NOTED UNDERSEA EXPLORER

M.E.B.A. Government Fleet mariners sailing with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will be part of future efforts to map the deepest parts of the world’s oceans after a new agency partnership with noted undersea explorer Victor Vescovo. NOAA will collaborate with Vescovo’s company Caladan Oceanic, LLC to explore, characterize, and map unknown areas of the deep ocean. In 2018 and 2019, as part of “The Five Deeps Expedition,” Vescovo journeyed in a human-occupied submersible vehicle to depths ranging from 3.5 miles to 7 miles into the deepest trenches of the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Southern and Arctic oceans.

Through the recently-signed memorandum of agreement, NOAA and Caladan agree to meet regularly, share objectives, plans and needs, and look for ways to provide assistance on shared goals.

HALLS CLOSED FOR GOOD FRIDAY

Union halls and offices will be closed tomorrow for Good Friday. Officials and some staffers can still be reached by cellphone and email during the lead-in to Easter weekend.

-----FINISHED WITH ENGINES-----



The M.E.B.A. is the nation's oldest maritime labor union, established in 1875. M.E.B.A.'s expertise and proven track record of readiness, safety, and loyalty in answering America's call to action in times of both peace and war is unrivaled in the world. M.E.B.A. HQ – Phone: (202) 638-5355; mebahq@mebaunion.org. Visit us on Facebook. For publication and related inquiries (and to send photos & hot news tips) contact Marco Cannistraro, M.E.B.A. Special Projects & Communications – marco@mebaunion.org Visit us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter and check us out on Instagram.